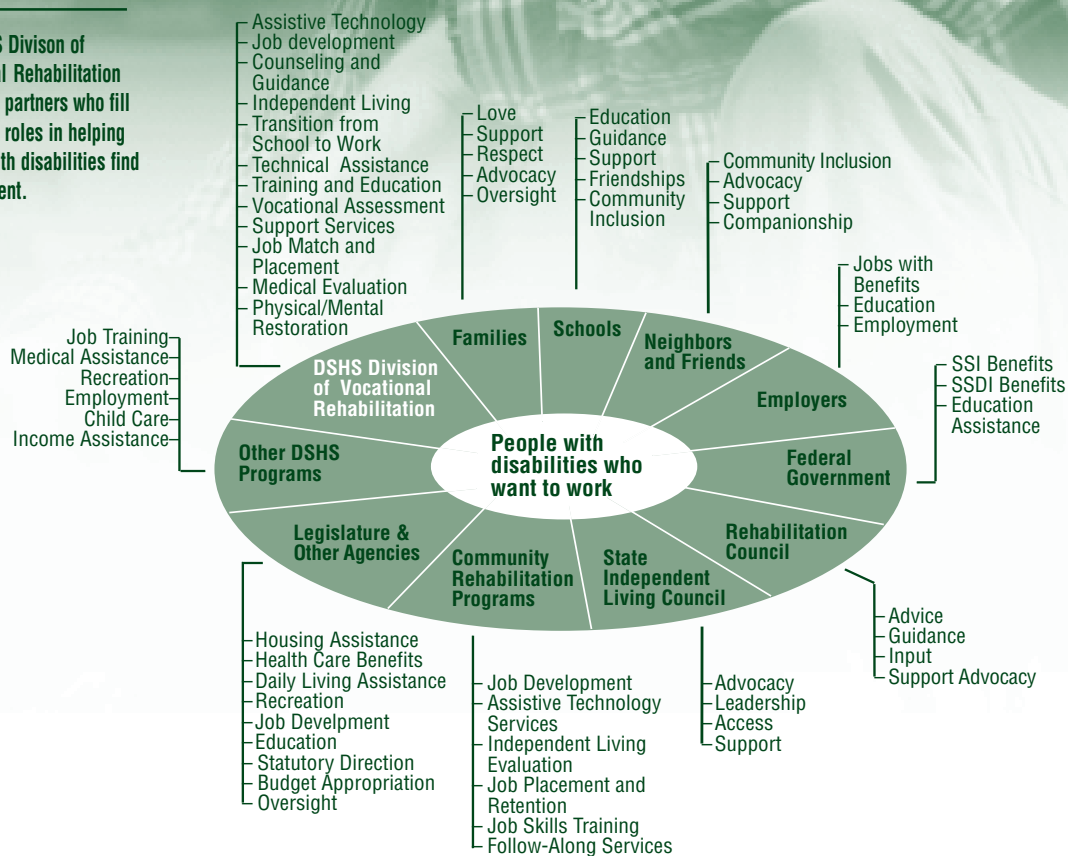




Photo courtesy Division of Vocational Rehabilitation

The DSHS Division of Vocational Rehabilitation has many partners who fill important roles in helping people with disabilities find employment.



# Building new skills:

## The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation

The most ubiquitous symbol of disability is the wheelchair stencil that marks the parking places closest to building entrances. But the majority of people with disabilities don't use wheelchairs. In fact, many disabilities don't involve people's mobility; they are the result of mental illness, learning disabilities, developmental disabilities, chemical dependency, and brain injuries. Also, some disabilities that do impair mobility are invisible; for instance, a person with emphysema or asthma may have trouble walking very far, but this wouldn't be obvious to the person in the next parking place.

All of these people have two things in common: the experience of other people's misunderstanding, discomfort and prejudice about their disabilities, and the protection of the federal Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), passed in 1990.

The ADA recognizes that "disability is a part of the human condition," and that most of us will, at some point in our lives, become disabled. We are all vulnerable to a car accident, a sports injury, a physical or psychiatric illness, or the effects of aging.

In the past, serious disability nearly always resulted in lifelong unemployment and poverty. Many people with disabilities live on meager benefits provided by the Social Security Administration. But advocates for people with disabilities have worked long and hard to persuade employers and the public to focus on what people with disabilities can do rather than what they cannot do. This has been - and continues to be - an uphill battle. Today, about 70 percent of people with disabilities remain unemployed. But our culture is slowly changing, and so are our workplaces.

The ADA requires employers to provide "reasonable accommodations" so that people with disabilities can work, and forbids discrimination against job applicants with disabilities. But in order to work, many people with disabilities need specialized training and education, adaptive technology, work experience, and help finding the right job. These services are provided by the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR).

The federal Department of Education provides a four-to-one match of state dollars to fund these services.

### Residents Receiving DSHS Services: SFY 2000

DSHS Services by Program	Total Clients
<b>Division of Vocational Rehabilitation</b>	<b>26,485</b>
Vocational Rehabilitation Case Mgt	25,955
Independent Living (IL) Case Mgt.	230
Assess Job Skill	11,970
Medical and Psychological Services	2,585
Training, Education, Supplies	5,270
Personal Support Services	7,720
Work Support	3,920

Source: The DSHS Client Data Base, Research and Data Analysis FY2000

## How DVR services work

The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation operates 37 offices around the state that serve as the entry points for people with disabilities who want to go to work. The vocational rehabilitation counselors at these offices share the philosophy that anyone who wants to work can, no matter what his or her disability.

The division primarily serves those whose disabilities are not the result of a workplace injury. There are occasional exceptions to this, however, when people have exhausted the resources available to them through the state Department of Labor and Industries.

The DVR counselors help clients sort through their abilities and interests, their career aspirations, the barriers they face, and the specific kinds of help they will need to become employed. Then they write an employment plan, and marshal the resources of the client, other agencies and service providers to implement it. If, for instance, someone needs college education or vocational training, the counselor will help her apply for grants or scholarships and enroll in the appropriate school. If other sources of funding are not available, DVR will pay for the tuition, books, transportation - and many other services - needed to help someone get a job.

## Goodwill Industries of the Inland Northwest, Spokane

**Services:** A nonprofit community rehabilitation program certified by the DSHS Division of Vocational Rehabilitation for the provision of vocational assessment, job training, job placement and job retention services.

**Communities served:** Spokane, Stevens, Ferry, Pend Oreille, Lincoln, Grant, Adams, Whitman, Garfield and Asotin counties.

**DSHS clients:** 1,550

**Private as well as public clients?** Yes

**Year formed:** 1939

**Employees:** 380

**Payroll per year:** \$8.8 million combined staff and client payroll

**Total annual budget:** \$12.5 million

**DSHS or federal funding brought into the community through contract with DSHS:** \$1.2 million

These counselors often refer clients to private or nonprofit Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRPs) for various kinds of help. These local organizations provide services such as training in independent living, resume writing, basic job skills, on-the-job work experiences, and matching applicants and employers.

For instance, if an employer hires someone with cerebral palsy who looks significantly different, the CRP might meet with his or her prospective coworkers to explain the disease and its effects. This would give them a chance to ask questions, and help them be more welcoming when the

new person comes to work. Staff from the CRP might also help employers think through job requirements in new ways that open up opportunities for people with disabilities, and teach employers how to comply with the ADA. They may also arrange for DVR to reimburse an employer for on-the-job training if a new employee with a disability needs more training than would ordinarily be provided.

To help people go to work, DVR also contracts with providers of a wide array of assistive technologies - that is, technologies that help people with disabilities do more. The term "assistive technology" can include everything from specialized software

that enables people with limited vision to use a computer, to a paper cup that makes it possible for someone who uses a wheelchair to get water from a drinking fountain that would otherwise be too high to reach. (People who are nearsighted but don't regard themselves as disabled might think of glasses or contact lenses as assistive technology that makes it possible for them to drive.)

If people with disabilities need physical therapy, specialized medical care, occupational therapy, or other

services in order to go to work, DVR can help them find it and pay for it. However, DVR pays only when what's needed is not provided by any other insurance the client may have, or other government programs. Clients also participate in paying for services if they can afford to do so.

The average expenditure for each DVR client is \$3,900.

Some of DVR's clients are still in high school, because DVR also provides school-to-work transition services that help teens with disabilities prepare for work and enter the workforce.

## DVR and the Workforce Investment Act

In 1998, the U. S. Congress passed the Workforce Investment Act, which mandates that states reorganize and improve the services they provide to help people get and keep jobs. This act requires that DVR work more closely with the Employment Security Department, the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board, and other agencies involved in employment.

Our state is creating a network of one-stop centers to provide job training and employment services that are called WorkSource centers. DVR is playing an important role in the development of WorkSource by advocating for making these centers both physically and programmatically accessible to people with disabilities.



Photo by Della Jordan

### Learning new skills

A 1996 motor vehicle accident deprived the Tri-Cities resident Roberto Montalvo of his ability to earn a living as a farm laborer. He sought help from DSHS's Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, which helped the paraplegic obtain job training. The Pasco resident now works as an assembler at Titanium Sports Technologies in Kennewick.

Read Montalvo's story on Facing the Future Profiles, located at <http://www.wa.gov/dshs/FacingtheFuture/NewsProfiles>

Not all of these centers have become fully accessible, so DVR will help conduct accessibility reviews and provide technical assistance to ensure that they are welcoming and useable for people with all types of disabilities. DVR staff will also be co-located at many WorkSource Centers, so that they can provide services to clients, and help partner-agency staff become more competent at meeting the needs of people with disabilities.

### Jerry Otis



Photo by Della Jordan

Jerry Otis uses a wheelchair because of a brain injury suffered during a football practice almost 40 years ago. But that doesn't stop him from helping other people who use wheelchairs by building ramps at their homes. He also raises money, finds donated lumber and other supplies and organizes volunteer labor.

Read about Jerry Otis on Facing the Future Profiles, located at <http://www.wa.gov/dshs/FacingtheFuture/NewsProfiles>

## Challenges for DVR

### Putting clients in charge

People with disabilities have demanded their right to make decisions about their own lives, and this includes decisions about what jobs they want, what education or training they need, and what services they require in order to meet their vocational goals.

In the past, DVR counselors were presumed to know what was best for their clients. The counselor was regarded as the person in charge of the rehabilitation process. Today, there is a shift toward regarding the client as the person in charge. Certainly clients are the real experts on their own needs, preferences, and ambitions.

This shift is a part of the ongoing movement for equality and full inclusion for people with disabilities. Old protective and paternalistic attitudes are no longer acceptable to clients, no matter what their disability. But this is not a change that comes easily; it requires that counselors learn new skills, and become coaches and supporters of their clients rather than authority figures.

Client self-determination is also problematic for some clients, who may have legal guardians who make decisions for them. Some clients are not able to speak, and

some are so cognitively impaired that it requires special skill to elicit information from them about their preferences. Nonetheless, DVR's goal is to maximize client choice for every person they serve, and to give people the support they need to do this.

### Staff training, recruitment, and retention

The federal government has raised the academic qualifications for vocational rehabilitation counselors, and by the year 2013, all of them will be required to have master's degrees in rehabilitation counseling. DVR

now pays for staff members to take up to five hours a week of paid work time to pursue this educational objective, and covers the cost of tuition.

While DVR is very supportive of higher standards for its counselors, these new federal requirements are problematic. DVR has not increased its staff for nearly a decade, and subtracting five hours a week from the time counselors can spend with clients compounds the problem of shortages of vocational rehabilitation counselors in some areas of the state. (See next section for more on client waiting lists.)

## Morningside, Olympia

**Services:** A private nonprofit Community Rehabilitation Program certified by the DSHS Division of Vocational Rehabilitation for the provision of vocational assessment, job training, job placement, and job retention services.

**Communities served:** Thurston, Mason, Jefferson, Clallam, Grays Harbor, Pacific, and Lewis counties.

**DSHS clients:** 550

**Private as well as public clients?** Yes

**Year formed:** 1963

**Employees:** 100

**Payroll per year:** \$5,385,841

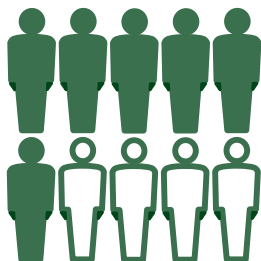
**Total annual budget:** \$6,556,000

**DSHS or federal funding brought into the community through contract with DSHS:** \$6.4 million



## 60% of people with disabilities kept job for three months after completing a vocational rehabilitation plan

*Their median hourly wage was \$8.25*



Source: Data from the longitudinal *WorkFirst Study: 3000 Washington Families* (being conducted by the University of Washington and Washington State's Employment Security Department). Available on the Internet at <http://www.wa.gov/WORKFIRST/about/StudyIndex2.htm>

And, at a time when staff shortages are already troublesome, 39 percent of DVR field managers and 53 percent of its executive and program administrators will be eligible to retire within the next few years.

### Client waiting lists

Because more people were applying for services than DVR staff could serve, waiting lists for services have developed in various areas of western Washington and in the Spokane area. Most of these lists have now been cleared, but preventing them from developing again will be difficult. When waiting lists develop, the federal government requires that DVR establish an "order of selection" that ensures that first priority for service will be given to people with the most significant disabilities. This "order of selection" is intended to

prevent DVR from taking the "easier" cases first - which inevitably results in people with the most significant disabilities being stuck in last place.

Often, people with less significant disabilities can be served by other programs, such as WorkSource, a job service provided by the state's Employment Security Department.

DVR is the only program with staff specially qualified to meet the needs of those with the most significant disabilities.

### Raising standards of success

In the past, DVR has defined success as a client getting a job and holding it for 90 days. This has been the point at which DVR's work was considered finished, and cases were closed. About 60 percent of DVR clients who completed employment plans achieved this milestone in 2001.

Today, people are setting their sights higher. DVR leaders want to help their clients get not just any job, but good jobs - jobs with benefits, with possibilities for career advancement, and with wages that help people lift themselves out of poverty. And DVR also wants to increase the proportion of clients who succeed in carrying out their employment plans and going to work.

### A different path to independence



Photo courtesy Division of Vocational Rehabilitation

A car accident injured Theresa Dillon and killed her mother and 4-year-old sister when she was 18 days old. The accident left her with physical limitations that made it difficult for her to find a job. DSHS's Division of Vocational Rehabilitation helped her attend college at Yakima Valley Community College. Then DVR helped her obtain a job at the Baby Jogger Company in Yakima.

Read her story on Facing the Future Profiles, located at <http://www.wa.gov/dshs/FacingtheFuture/NewsProfiles>